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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: GETTING REAL WITH SERBIAN
OPINION MAKERS

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: COMs of Contact Group countries and the UN told influential Serbian opinion makers that the GOS must do more to prepare its citizens for the likely outcome of Kosovo's final status. The UN and Contact Group stand ready to assist Serbia to get through the Kosovo settlement and become a stable, strong, and prosperous European state. List of Serbian attendees in paragraph 11. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On June 14, at the French Residence, the Ambassador and the Director of the UN Office in Belgrade joined the French Ambassador over lunch with influential Serbian opinion makers to convey the message that (1) the Contact Group fully supports the UNOSSEK-led Kosovo final status process, (2) the GOS -- and by implication other opinion makers -- must do more right now to prepare Serbs for the likely outcome of Kosovo's final status and (3) the Contact Group and UN stand ready to assist Serbia to get through the Kosovo settlement and become a stable, strong, and prosperous European state. The group of prominent media, religious and policy leaders was quite receptive to the frank nature of the discussion and wished their government was equally forthcoming about the realities of the future status of Kosovo.

UN lays it out

13. (SBU) UN Office Director Harston reported that UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari expects the status of Kosovo to be resolved by the end of 2006, and that in mid-July he will present a report to the UNSC containing "no surprises." Harston said "messages have been clear" concerning final status and that, unfortunately, Ahtisaari could cite almost no progress from recent UNOSSEK-led talks in Vienna. Both Ambassadors Polt and Pernet voiced unequivocal support for the UNOSSEK process and Harston averred that UNOSSEK was in close contact and coordination with the Contact Group.

GOS strategy is ineffective and unclear

14. (SBU) The consensus of the attendees was that

the GOS is not open enough regarding its rationale and expectations from the talks, and that the GOS negotiating team is not presenting its case effectively. Ivan Vejvoda said the GOS team had a "seminar" approach to the talks, as if they are discussing an academic case study rather than pragmatic solutions. Ambassador Pernet noted how the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) had been able to formulate and publish a platform while the GOS had not. DANAS Editor Ramac said the SOC had a history of being more willing to engage, citing (some in) the SOC's willingness to encourage dialogue and cooperation with UNMIK and KFOR after 1999. Father Irinej said he was heartened by the lack of "public outrage" to his June 7 interview with Belgrade daily Glas Javnosti. (Note: Irinej was the first SOC official to imply publicly that there must be preparations made for the possibility of an independent Kosovo. End note.)

Serbian public is not engaged with negotiations

16. (SBU) Ambassador Polt stressed that when Kosovo's final status is determined, the lack of practical engagement by the GOS will likely lead to a settlement package being presented which the majority of the IC would find acceptable. It would then again be up to Tadic, Kostunica and other GOS officials to choose to frame the post-settlement reaction in a productive manner or not. Ambassador Pernet said one of the most troubling aspects of how the GOS is handling negotiations now is the "lack of public debate" on the issue. POLITIKA editor Smajlovic agreed, saying she was "ashamed" that frank discussions

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on Kosovo status are occurring at foreign embassies in Belgrade, but not with the GOS.

17. (SBU) Smajlovic nevertheless expressed dismay at the CG's implied "act of God" approach to the negotiations outcome and said that it appears to Serbs that the end of the process is already known to the international community. She agreed that the DS and DSS will suffer politically if the lack of public debate would lead to confusion and outrage if Kosovo independence is announced. Ivanovic said cynically that perhaps "six years of democracy" is not enough for people to know to demand more transparency. Vejvoda said the GOS itself does not understand that there is a "cost for peace and stability" which is the abandonment of extreme positions.

GOS has proven inflexible

18. (SBU) Harston expressed dismay that both President Tadic and Prime Minister Kostunica were presenting the same inflexible position on Kosovo status as Milosevic did with eastern Slavonia, and that on Kosovo, the public stance of the DS and DSS is no different from that of the Radicals. Harston also alleged that Kostunica and Tadic are unwilling to meet with UN or other international representatives one-on-one to avoid being seen as "complicit" in a final outcome, and that both men use the common DS-DSS approach as cover to end any honest discussions of Kosovo status. Kosovo Serb leader Ivanovic added that the GOS negotiators cannot hope to achieve any measure of success with "just saying no," and that it "more important to get than to ask."

Unlike most negotiations, Ivanovic said, the GOS sounds less willing to compromise publicly than it is in private discussions. Ivanovic indicated this was a sign of a "hands-off" and divested approach by Tadic and Kostunica to the actual negotiations, and that the (increasingly desperate) negotiators are left in charge of the process.

Possible outcomes

¶9. (U) Vejvoda sought to frame a possible Serbian reaction to Kosovo independence in a historical context. He said that when PM Djindjic made efforts in January 2003 to address Kosovo status, it was the international community that had said his moves were premature. However, despite public opinion being against compromise or reduced sovereignty over Kosovo, Vejvoda said that there was a "sense of relief" among the public that the issue was finally being addressed at all. He suggested that the recent referendum in Montenegro shows that sometimes inflexible rhetoric can be followed by practical, if grudging, steps forward.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: The purpose of this lunch was to impress upon influential policy makers a similarly realistic message we tell Tadic and Kostunica: the Contact Group and UNOSK are unified, and time is overdue to prepare for "the day after" a settlement of Kosovo status. The GOS is either unwilling or unable (or both) to inform its citizens of the probable outcome for Kosovo, but this should not deter other opinion makers from working to help the Serbian people better understand an unwelcome reality. The international community, in turn, would do its part to demonstrate its commitment to help Serbia - whether we are joined by the GOS or not - to help Kosovo Serbs on the ground and to move forward and become a stable and prosperous European state.

¶11. (U) Attendees:

US/France/UN:

- French Ambassador Hugues PERNET (host)

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- Ambassador Michael POLT
- Mr. Julian HARSTON, Director, UN Office in Belgrade
- LTC Thierry NAVREZ, French Defense Attache
- Mr. Didier LARROQUE, PolOff, French Embassy (notetaker)
- Mr. Demian SMITH, PolOff, US Embassy (notetaker)

Serbs:

- Bishop-Elect Father Irinej DOBRIJEVIC, Serbian Orthodox Church
- Mr. Ivan VEJVODA, Director, Balkan Trust for Democracy
- Ms. Ljiljana SMAJLOVIC, Editor-in-Chief, POLITIKA
- Mr. Mihajlo RAMAC, Editor-in-Chief, DANAS
- Ms. Duska ANASTASIJEVIC, Reporter, VREME
- Mr. Oliver IVANOVIC, Chair, Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija

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